2.5. External dimension of the EU’s asylum policy

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Section 2.5 External dimension

In 2025, the EU continued pursuing a whole-of-route approach to migration management through coordination with various stakeholders. Initiatives included addressing root causes of migration; helping partner countries increase their capacity in border management and countering smuggling networks; contributing to protection solutions for displaced people in different parts of the world; and offering safe and legal pathways to Europe as alternative to irregular migration.

The EU and its Member States have been the largest donors in the Syrian crisis.55 Following the change of the regime in December 2024 and the lifting of economic sanctions against Syria, new funding was allocated to enhance institutions in the country, support bottom-up community actions, revitalise urban and rural economies, increase access to finances for the most vulnerable and promote transitional justice.56 In the ninth edition of the Brussels Conference ‘Standing with Syria’, the European Commission announced that it committed EUR 2.5 billion for 2025 and 2026 to support Syria’s transition and socio-economic recovery, while addressing humanitarian needs.57 In January 2026, the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council visited Damascus and renewed bilateral relations to support a peaceful and inclusive transition, enhance economic cooperation and provide additional financial support to the country.58 Since 2011, the EU and its Member States have mobilised nearly EUR 37 billion for humanitarian and resilience assistance within Syria and in host communities across Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Türkiye.59

The EU has provided sustained support to Türkiye in its efforts to host and address the needs of over 3 million refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Syria but also from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Somalia. Due to the substantial funding needs, in 2015 the European Commission established the Facility for Refugees in Turkey which has allowed for the swift, effective and efficient mobilisation of EU assistance to refugees in Türkiye. Since then, the EU has used the facility to provide essential humanitarian and development assistance to address the needs of refugees and host communities in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, covering areas such as education, protection, health, municipal infrastructure, basic needs and socio-economic support, migration management, and gender aspects. Between 2011 and September 2025, the total EU funding allocated to refugee and host community assistance in Türkiye amounted to

EUR 12.4 billion.[60] In December 2025, the European Commission issued an Implementing Decision allocating a maximum amount of EUR 1.2 billion to support essential needs of refugees and for migration management in Türkiye for 2025-2027.[61]

The EU is also a key donor in Afghanistan, including through the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), which aims to support voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration and provides assistance to host countries. Since 2021, it has provided over EUR 860 million in humanitarian funding for the crisis in Afghanistan.[62] Throughout 2025, the EU provided financial contributions to UN programmes and services to boost community resilience in Afghanistan, foster development and education, and ensure safe transport of humanitarian personnel and relief supplies.[63]

Through Global Europe and its multi-annual indicative programmes, the EU continued to pursue development-related goals, including the promotion of human rights and democracy, peace and stability. Priority areas and specific objectives are defined through dialogue with partner countries, EU Member States, civil society organisations, women and youth organisations, local authorities, private sector, the UN and other key stakeholders in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Americas and the Caribbean.

The launching of the new Pact on the Mediterranean in November 2025 was a key development in this area, especially to foster enhanced cooperation with Mediterranean countries. The pact, which was informed by broad and inclusive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, constitutes a framework of 176 initiatives around the three pillars of youth and civil society empowerment; integration of economies; and security and migration management. Practical implementation is guided by a dedicated action plan, presented in the first quarter of 2026.[64]

Comprehensive partnerships were concluded with Egypt,[65] Jordan[66] and Mauritania[67] over the past years. Throughout 2025, the Prague Process continued to promote migration partnerships among countries of the EU, Schengen area, Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans and Central Asia, and Türkiye.[68]

In June 2025, the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina strengthened their migration and border management cooperation by signing a new Frontex Status Agreement. The agreement will enable Frontex to deliver joint operations along Bosnia and Herzegovina’s borders, including the borders with neighbouring non-EU countries, and at border-crossing points, including airports. The agreement aims to enhance border management capabilities, assist in preventing irregular border crossings and strengthen overall security in the region.[69]

As part of the broader effort to tackle migrant smuggling, in April 2025 Europol signed a working arrangement with Egypt. This cooperation extends to other law enforcement areas, such as the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime.[70]

To further develop collaborative solutions to the growing challenges posed by migrant smuggling, the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling held its second international conference in December 2025, bringing together more than 80 delegations from EU Member States and international partners from five different continents. Participants reiterated their commitment to strengthen international cooperation in tackling migrant smuggling. Since its

establishment in 2023, the alliance has achieved significant results in dismantling smuggling operations, while the European Commission supports law enforcement authorities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean through operational partnerships and capacity-building projects.71 A joint declaration, endorsed by 58 partners in the meeting, set the way forward in this collaborative process along three main pillars of preventing migrant smuggling, increasing effectiveness in responding to migrant smuggling, and providing alternatives to irregular migration by promoting safe and regular mobility pathways.72

In addition to collaboration based on positive incentives, the EU has incorporated the possibility of withdrawing benefits in exceptional situations when existing arrangements are used in ways that pose significant migration and security challenges. To this end, in June 2025 the European Parliament and the EU Council reached a provisional political agreement on the revision of the visa suspension mechanism, which was proposed by the European Commission in October 2023.73 The revised text provided additional grounds to suspend the visa waiver, including hybrid threats, such as state-sponsored instrumentalisation of migrants; investor citizenship schemes operated by third countries with visa-free access to the EU; lack of alignment with EU visa policy; violations of the United Nations Charter; severe breaches of international human rights or humanitarian law; and non-compliance with international court decisions.74 Following approval by the Parliament in October 2025 and adoption by the Council in November 2025, the new Regulation entered into force on 31 December 2025.

A Visa Liberalisation Action Plan was handed by the European Commission to Armenian authorities in November 2025, opening the perspective of visa-free access to the EU for Armenian citizens once the benchmarks included in the action plan are met.75

In parallel, the EU has traditionally included in its repertoire of protection solutions the provision of safe and legal pathways for those in need, thus enabling the most vulnerable refugees to access protection without resorting to perilous journeys. Since 2015, EU-sponsored resettlement schemes have helped more than 135,000 persons in need of protection find shelter in the EU.76 In March 2025, the second meeting of the High-Level Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Committee took place, chaired by the European Commission and bringing together representatives from the European Parliament, the Council, EU Member States, the EUAA, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and civil society organisations. Participants strategised on collective priorities for future Union resettlement and humanitarian efforts.77

Informed by these discussions, as well as the UNHCR's Projected Global Resettlement Needs report, in November 2025 the European Commission presented a proposal for an EU Council Implementing Decision on the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan for 2026-2027. The plan aims to support the EU and national administrations to build partnerships with non-EU countries, with a view to fostering dialogue and increasing the protection space for those in need of protection. It was adopted by the Council in December 2025 and entered into force in January 2026.78

Overstretched capacity of national reception systems, as well as other significant political and financial considerations in certain Member States, may have limited the immediate ability of Member States to contribute to resettlement efforts. Overall, according to the plan, nine Member

States provided 10,430 contributions for resettlement and humanitarian admission for 2026-2027.[79] Nonetheless, the plan's strategic approach aims to increase protection spaces along migratory routes and further strengthen the EU's partnerships with key non-EU countries which host many refugees. It also encourages Member States to develop partnerships with civil society organisations to create community sponsorship initiatives and humanitarian corridors, thus increasing their respective contributions toward resettlement and humanitarian admission goals.[80]

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